

Leading the Democratic opposition to Russell and other Fusionists was the main Democratic newspaper, the *Raleigh News and Observer*. In June 1894, during the campaign season leading up to the disastrous defeat of the Democrats by Fusionists, Josephus Daniels and wealthy Democrat Julian S. Carr developed a plan for Daniels to acquire the *News and Observer* with Carr's financial backing in order to make the paper a tool of the Democratic Party. By 1895, Daniels had returned to Raleigh from Washington, D.C., where he had been serving in a post to which he was appointed by President Grover Cleveland. Once back in North Carolina, Daniels used his paper to provide a voice for the Democratic Party, attacking Republicans, blacks, Populists, and Democrats he viewed as threats to the party. When Daniels assumed control of the paper, it was financially unstable, but, with Carr's assistance and Daniels' personal style, the paper grew from a small, local circulation to a statewide success.²¹

Fusion Re-Visited in 1896

Groundwork for the 1896 election was laid slowly as each political group held its own convention, focusing not only on the local and state elections, but also the national presidential election. Nationwide, Populists and Democrats differed on standards for coining gold and silver to offset economic problems. Statewide, Populists held the balance of power—whichever political party was lucky enough to forge a relationship with the Populists would be victorious in November. Republicans met in Raleigh in May 1896 to plan their strategy and seek methods to woo

the Populists. Despite internal dissent, the convention managed to put forth Russell as a candidate for governor over Oliver Dockery, favored by African American voters. Russell's platform touted the successes of the 1895 legislature and reminded black voters that if Democrats regained power, disfranchisement was certain. The Democrats, who held their convention in June, were still disorganized after the 1894 defeat; their platform was based on a retelling of their past record and featured no new promises for change in their operations. Populists held their convention in August after observing those of the Republicans and Democrats and adopted a standard platform and their own set of candidates without acknowledging Fusion as an option.²²

The 1896 election posed a multitude of problems for New Hanover voters. Although there were clearly three distinct political parties, factions within those parties sought to merge their interests with others, creating a whirlwind of Fusion possibilities among white Republicans, white Populists, black Republicans, Regular Democrats, and Reform Democrats. With his political skills and brusque personality well known in all local camps, Russell maintained a tenuous position as a candidate. Black Republicans viewed Russell's candidacy and Fusionists with hesitancy since some believed that the Republicans could win without the help of former Democrats that had pushed for white supremacy in the past. Others questioned Russell's commitment to the concerns of African Americans. Still other factions questioned the actions of the Police Board, citing the changes instituted as an example of whites using the black vote to get elected and then turning their back on the needs of the black community.²³

²¹ For more information on Daniels and his role in politics and publishing in North Carolina, see his autobiography, Josephus Daniels, *Editor in Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1941).

²² Edmonds, *Negro and Fusion Politics*, 48-54.

²³ McDuffie, "Politics in Wilmington," 428-432.